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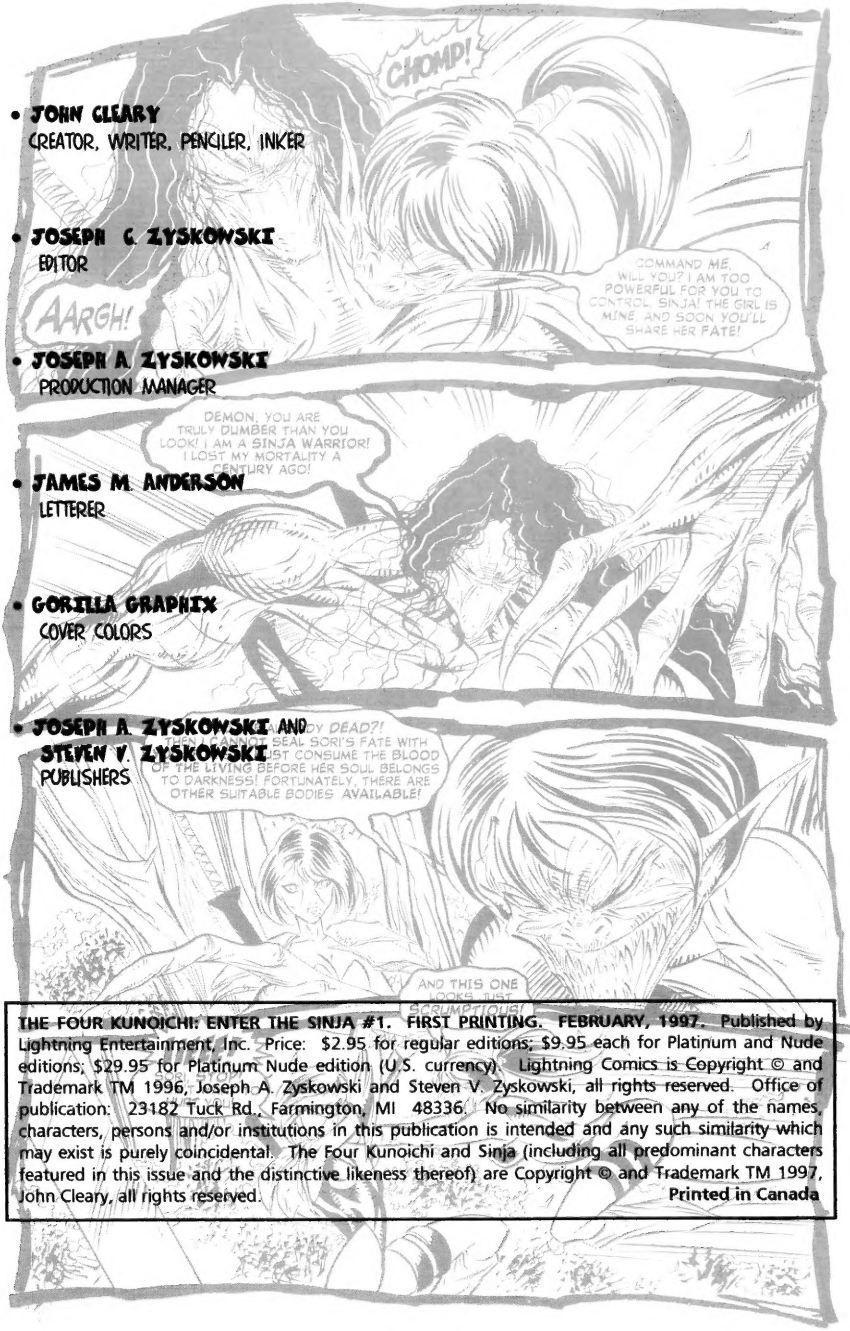
THE Four Kunoichi
ENTER... THE NINJA
JOHN CLEARY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AND THIS ONE LOOKS JUST

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PREVIOUSLY...
FOUR LITTLE GIRLS ADRIFT AT SEA, WERE RESCUED BY A SHAOLIN MONK NAMED TAI SHEN. THE MONK RAISED THE GIRLS AS HIS VERY OWN DAUGHTERS, TEACHING EACH A DIFFERENT FORM OF KUNG FU. ON THE 18TH BIRTHDAY OF THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER, TAI SHEN READ THE GIRLS A LETTER FOUND LONG AGO IN THEIR BOAT...A LETTER FROM THEIR MOTHER...THAT WOULD FOREVER CHANGE THE COURSE OF THEIR LIVES."
THE GIRLS' PARENTS WERE OF THE KOGA NINJA CLAN, UNDER ATTACK BY THE LEGENDARY SAMURAI, NOBAGUNA ODA.** IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO SAVE THEIR DAUGHTERS, THE GIRLS WERE CAST ADRIFT AT SEA IN HOPE THAT THEY MIGHT BE FOUND BY AN HONORABLE STRANGER WHO WOULD CARE FOR THEM AND TRAIN THEM TO BECOME KUNOICHI.***
AFTER MANY YEARS OF TEACHING AND MUCH ADVENTURE, TAI SHEN KNEW THE DAY WOULD COME WHEN HIS DAUGHTERS WOULD LEAVE HOME IN SEARCH OF THEIR KOGA NINJA HERITAGE.
ON THE FIRST DAY OF THAT JOURNEY, THE FOUR KUNOICHI FOUND THEIR TRAVELS LADEN WITH DANGER.
*SEE KUNOICH #1, SEPTEMBER '96, FOR ORIGIN.
**NOBAGUNA ODA IS A HISTORIC SAMURAI RESPONSIBLE FOR CRUSHING THE POWER OF THE NINJA IN THE 16TH CENTURY.
***KUNOICHI TRANSLATES TO MEAN "FEMALE NINJA." --JOHN

THE FOUR KUNOICHI ACCIDENTALLY STUMBLED INTO THE FOREST OF THE DAMNED AND WERE ATTACKED BY A HORRIBLE ABOMINATION KNOWN AS, ONNYO, LORD OF THE DAMNED...A BLOODTHIRSTY CREATURE OF LEGEND, RUMORED TO HAVE ESCAPED FROM HELL!
IN A FIERCE BATTLE, THE FOUR KUNOICHI WARDED OFF ONNYO'S ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY THEM... UNTIL THE VERY END.
SORI LET HER GUARD DOWN AND ONNYO QUICKLY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITY! AS HE CLAMPED HIS RAZOR SHARP FANGS INTO SORI'S ARM, BLOOD SPURTED AND BONE WAS CRUSHED! HAVING TASTED HIS PREY AND SENSING THE SUNRISE, THE VAMPIRE RETREATED INTO DARKNESS...
VOWING ONE DAY TO RETURN AND MAKE THE REST OF THE GIRLS HIS SLAVES THROUGHOUT ETERNITY.*

* SEE THE FOUR KUNOICHI: BLOOD LUST #1 FOR DETAILS.--JOHN

THE PRESENT.
IT HAS BEEN TWO DAYS SINCE THE ATTACK ON SORI. WITH EACH PASSING HOUR SHE FALLS DEEPER INTO SICKNESS.
LOST IN THE WILDERNESS, THE FOUR KUNOICHI ARE DESPERATE TO FIND HELP FOR THEIR FALLEN SISTER.
KAIRA, SORI'S FEVER IS GETTING WORSE! WE MUST REST AND FIND HER WATER!
I AGREE, MIYO. WE'VE BEEN WALKING FOR HOURS AND I STILL CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET OUT OF THIS DAMNED FOREST!
I THINK I SEE A STREAM OVER THERE. LET'S GO.
THERE MUST BE A WAY OUT OF THIS CURSED FOREST.
MAYBE WE SHOULD TRY RETRACING OUR STEPS?
WHAT? ARE YOU CRAZY?! THAT CREATURE IS PROBABLY WAITING FOR US TO RETURN!
I THINK WE SHOULD KEEP MOVING FORWARD. EVENTUALLY WE WILL FIND HELP!
I HOPE.

HERE YOU GO, SIS. DRINK THIS WATER. YOU'LL FEEL BETTER, I PROMISE. WE WON'T LET ANYTHING BAD HAPPEN TO YOU.
REMEMBER, YOU'RE KUNOICHI! YOU MUST BE STRONG!
OF COURSE NOT!
YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE SICK, IS ALL! DON'T WORRY, SORI, YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT, SOON.
SUDDENLY, FROM OUT OF NOWHERE, A MYSTERIOUS FIGURE APPEARS.
WHERE IS THE SICK CHILD? I HAVE COME TO HELP!
Kaira...
am I going...
to DIE?

DO NOT FEAR ME! I HAVE TRAVELED A GREAT DISTANCE TO BE AT YOUR SIDE. TAKE ME TO SORI. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!
EXCUSE ME... BUT, JUST WHO ARE YOU AND HOW IS IT YOU KNOW MY SISTER'S NAME?
THERE IS MUCH I KNOW ABOUT THE FOUR KUNOICHI, KAIRA, AND IN TIME ALL SHALL BE REVEALED. BUT RIGHT NOW, I MUST HELP SORI...
BEFORE THE VENOM OF DARKNESS CLAIMS HER SOUL!
THE EVIL HAS SPREAD FURTHER THAN I HAD EXPECTED, KAIRA. I CAN IMPROVE SORI'S STRENGTH, BUY HER A LITTLE MORE TIME, BUT I CANNOT CURE HER AS I HAD HOPED.
YOU MEAN...SHE'S GOING TO DIE?
YOU MUST HAVE FAITH, KAIRA!
THERE IS STILL A CHANCE SHE CAN BE SAVED...IF YOU FIND THE SINJA WHO DWELLS UPON MOUNT IGA.
HE IS THE ONLY ONE WITH THE POWER TO RID SORI OF THE EVIL DESTROYING HER BODY... AND HER SOUL.

SURELY...YOU JOKE! THE SINJA IS NOTHING BUT AN OLD LEGEND! IF HE WERE REAL, SURELY SOMEONE WOULD HAVE SEEN HIM AND NEW TALES WOULD HAVE BEEN TOLD.
ONLY IF THEY SURVIVED TO TELL THEIR STORY. THE LEGEND IS TRUE, LITTLE ONE. ONE DETAIL THAT HASN'T BEEN TOLD IS THAT THIS SINJA WAS ONCE, HIMSELF, A KOGA NINJA.
YOU WILL ALWAYS BE MY DARLING LITTLE KUNOICHI!
IF YOU WANT TO SAVE YOUR SISTER'S LIFE, GO AND SEEK OUT THE SINJA. TELL HIM OF YOUR HERITAGE. HE WILL HELP YOU.
NOW, MY PRECIOUS ANGELS, I MUST LEAVE YOU, BUT I WILL ALWAYS WATCH OVER YOU AND I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU.
M-M-MOTHER? IS IT...YOU?
WAS THAT THE SPIRIT OF OUR MOTHER?
WE ALL FELT MOTHER'S LOVE, KAIRA. SEISHIN HAS BLESSED US. WE SHOULDN'T QUESTION THIS EXPERIENCE. JUST ACCEPT IT... AS A GREAT GIFT.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT, SAIFEI. WE MUST FOLLOW MOTHER'S INSTRUCTIONS AND SEEK OUT THE SINJA. AS SHE SAID, "HE IS THE ONLY ONE WITH THE POWER TO RID SORI OF THE EVIL DESTROYING HER BODY... AND HER SOUL."

100 YEARS BEFORE...
A LEGEND WAS BORN.
HIS NAME WAS SHINGU KAMURA. HE WAS A KOGA NINJA ON A VALIANT MISSION.
A BEAST FROM THE UNDERWORLD HAD SLAUGHTERED HUNDREDS OF INNOCENTS.
IT WAS UP TO SHINGU TO END IT'S REIGN OF TERROR.
SUDDENLY, THE DEMON CAME UPON HIM!
IT'S GAPING JAWS SALIVATED WITH ANTICIPATION AT THE VERY THOUGHT OF ITS NEXT KILL.
SHINGU FOUGHT BRAVELY, BUT IN THE END, HE WAS NO MATCH.
WITH A FINAL SLASH OF THE HELLBORN'S ELONGATED ARM, SHINGU PLUMMETED DEEP INTO THE SEA.
HIS LUNGS FILLED WITH SALTY, LIQUID DEATH...UNTIL HE SUBMITTED TO A WATERY GRAVE.

SUDDENLY, SHINGU'S SPIRIT FOUND ITSELF AWASH IN WARM LIGHT.
I NEED A CHAMPION TO BALANCE THE FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL...ONE THAT WILL NOT BE CORRUPTED BY THE POWERS I BESTOW UPON HIM.
SINCE YOUR BIRTH, SHINGU, I HAVE WAITED FOR YOUR DEATH SO YOU COULD BECOME... MY SINJA!
DO NOT FEAR ME, SHINGU, FOR I AM SEISHIN, THE SPIRIT OF LIFE.
SEISHIN?! THEN...IT IS TRUE. I AM DEAD! AND THE CREATURE'S REIGN OF TERROR WILL CONTINUE!
THAT IS NOT THE WAY IT HAS TO BE.
AND, WITH A WAVE OF HER HAND, SEISHIN RESTORED LIFE TO SHINGU'S BODY, RESURRECTING HIM AS HER SINJA WARRIOR!
AS HE EMERGED FROM THE WATER'S ICY DEPTHS, HIS LUNGS FILLED WITH AIR ONCE AGAIN, AND HE KNEW THIS WAS HIS DESTINY!
HE WOULD NOT LET SEISHIN DOWN!

SEVERAL HOURS LATER, THE FOUR KUNOICHI FIND THEMSELVES IN THE WOODS SURROUNDING MOUNT IGA.
KAIRA, DO YOU REALLY THINK WE'LL FIND THE SINJA? WHAT IF THAT WASN'T OUR MOTHER, BUT ONE OF ONNYA'S ILLUSIONS?
SORI IS GETTING WORSE BY THE HOUR, MIYO. WE HAVE NO CHOICE. IF THE SINJA EXISTS, WE MUST FIND HIM.
KRAK!
SHHH!
DID YOU HEAR THAT?! SOMEONE IS FOLLOWING US!
WHO'S THERE?!
SHOW YOURSELF OR FACE THE WRATH OF THE FOUR KUNOICHI!
IEEYA!
HA! HA! HA!
IT WAS JUST A SCARED LITTLE RABBIT! LOOK AT OUR FEARLESS LEADER NOW!
YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN YOUR FACE!
HA! HA! HA!

BY UTILIZING THE MYSTICAL SINJA ART OF HENSO-JUTSU, THE ART OF DISGUISE, THE SINJA WARRIOR'S OMINOUS FORM EMERGES FROM WHAT BEFORE APPEARED AS A HARMLESS RABBIT!
SAIPE! AND MIYO'S LAUGHTER DISTRACTS THEM FROM NOTICING THE DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION TAKING PLACE....RIGHT BEHIND THEM!
MIYO...SORI... VERY QUIETLY AND CALMLY, WALK TOWARD ME. NOW!
WHY, KAIRA? IS THE BIG, BAD BUNNY MONSTER GONNA' GET US?!
HA! HA! HA!
Uh - oh.

SAIPE!!
MIYO!
STOP ACTING LIKE COWARDS! DON'T YOU KNOW WHO THIS IS? IT'S THE SINJA MOTHER SPOKE OF! HE'S HERE TO HELP US!
I AM SHINGU KAMURA, THE SINJA OF SEISHIN! WHO ARE YOU AND WHY HAVE YOU SOUGHT ME OUT?
WE ARE CALLED THE FOUR KUNOICHI. OUR DEAR SISTER, SORI, IS DYING. WE WERE TOLD IN A VISION THAT YOU ARE HER LAST CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL. PLEASE, GREAT SINJA...HELP US.
AND WHY SHOULD I HELP YOU?
BECAUSE WE, TOO, ARE KOGA NINJA. WE ARE LINKED BY ANCESTRY AND HONOR.

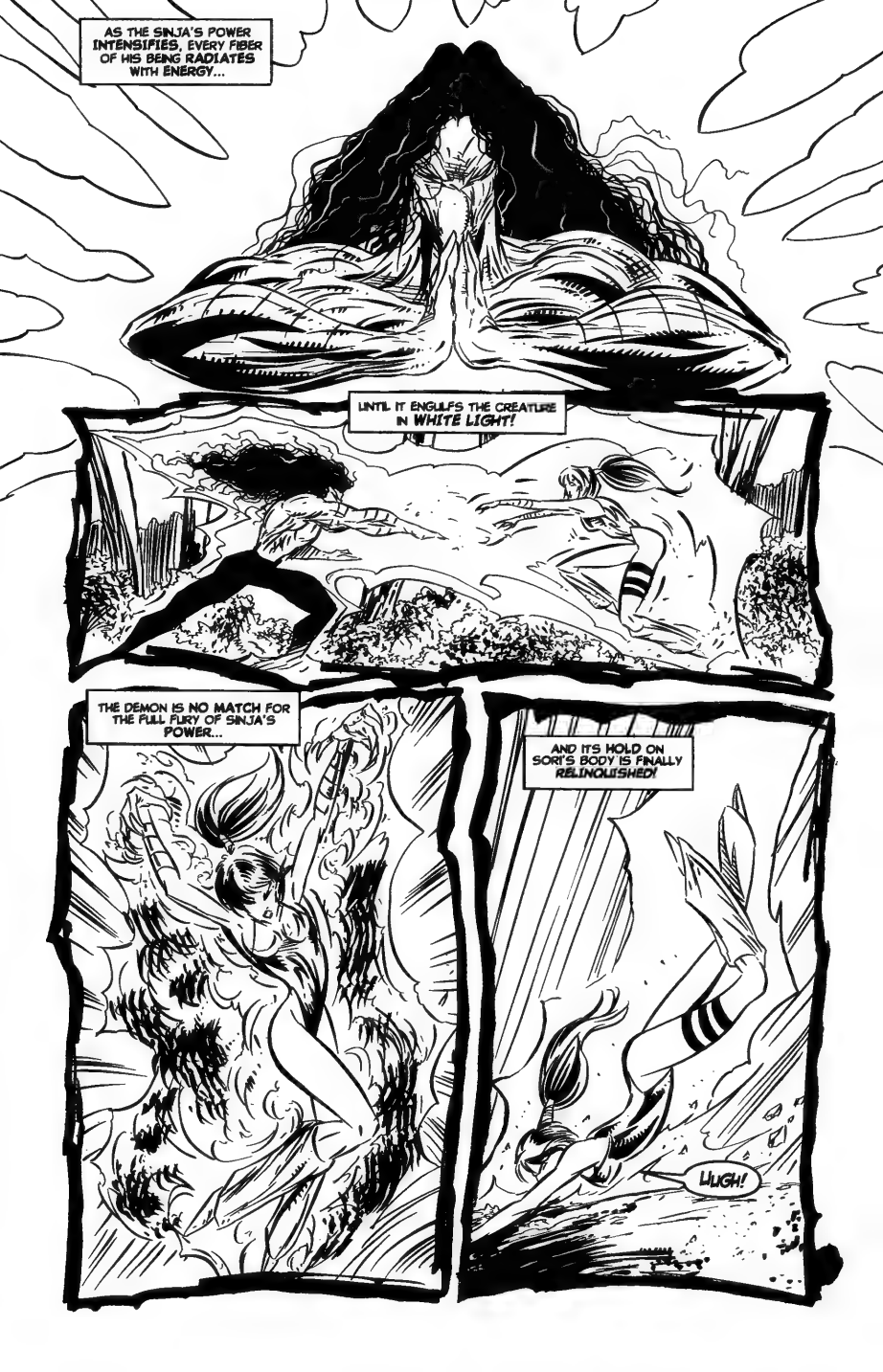
THE KOGA NINJA CLAN WAS DESTROYED BY NOBAGUNA ODA FIFTEEN YEARS AGO! HOW IS IT YOU SURVIVED?
WE WERE CAST TO SEA BY OUR MOTHER IN HOPE THAT SOMEONE HONORABLE WOULD FIND AND CARE FOR US. AFTER MANY DAYS WE WERE RESCUED BY A SHAOLIN MONK, THE MAN WE CALL OUR FATHER.
HE RAISED US IN THE WAYS OF THE SHAOLIN AND TAUGHT US ABOUT OUR KOGA NINJA HERITAGE. WE WERE ON A QUEST TO DISCOVER IF THERE WERE OTHER KOGA SURVIVORS WHEN WE WERE ATTACKED BY ONNYO, LORD OF THE DAMNED, AND SORI BECAME ILL. WE LEARNED OF YOUR EXISTENCE IN A VISION.
PLEASE, SHINGU KAMURA, YOU MUST HELP US!
ALL THESE YEARS I BELIEVED THE KOGA WERE DESTROYED! I THOUGHT I, ALONE, WAS THE LAST LIVING MEMBER OF OUR CLAN.
EVEN BEFORE YOU SPOKE, I SENSED SOMETHING STRANGELY FAMILIAR ABOUT YOU...WHAT I NOW RECOGNIZE AS OUR KOGA NINJA BOND.
OF COURSE, I WILL ASSIST YOU, ANY WAY I CAN.
THE PAIN! THE PAIN! SOMEONE HELP ME, PLEASE!!!
KAIRA, COME QUICK! SOMETHING TERRIBLE IS HAPPENING TO SORI!

THE PAIN... IT'S UNBEARABLE! I FEEL SOMETHING EVIL... TAKING CONTROL OF MY BODY! I JUST...CAN'T STOP IT!
OH, SORI, WHAT HAS ONNYO DONE TO YOU?!
YEARGH!
YOUR SISTER IS GONE, LITTLE GIRL! HER BODY NOW BELONGS TO ME! BUT DON'T WORRY, PRETTY ONE. SOON YOU, TOO, WILL BELONG TO DARKNESS!
OH, GREAT SINJA...PLEASE, DO SOMETHING!
HEAR ME, DEMON! IN THE NAME OF SEISHIN, THE SPIRIT OF LIFE, I COMMAND YOU...LEAVE THIS GIRL'S BODY AT ONCE!

CHOMP!
AARGH!
COMMAND ME, WILL YOU? I AM TOO POWERFUL FOR YOU TO CONTROL, SINJA! THE GIRL IS MINE, AND SOON YOU'LL SHARE HER FATE!
DEMON, YOU ARE TRULY DUMBER THAN YOU LOOK! I AM A SINJA WARRIOR! I LOST MY MORTALITY A CENTURY AGO!
YOU ARE ALREADY DEAD?! THEN I CANNOT SEAL SORI'S FATE WITH YOU...FOR SHE MUST CONSUME THE BLOOD OF THE LIVING BEFORE HER SOUL BELONGS TO DARKNESS! FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE OTHER SUITABLE BODIES AVAILABLE!
AND THIS ONE LOOKS JUST SCRUMPTIOUS!
NEEE!
SORI, STOP! I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU!

THIS IS NO LONGER OUR SISTER, MIYO! IT IS A MONSTER! WE MUST DEFEND OURSELVES OR WE'LL END UP JUST LIKE SORI!
GET AWAY FROM MY SISTER, DEMON! I WON'T LOSE MIYO TO YOU, TOO!
GHACK!
DAMN YOU, KAIRA! YOU CAN'T PREVENT THE INEVITABLE! THE WOLF FEASTS ON THE LAMB, JUST AS THE UNDEAD FEASTS ON THE LIVING! THE POWER OF EVIL WILL ALWAYS BE STRONGER THAN YOUR PETTY WILL TO SURVIVE! YOU CANNOT PREVENT YOUR DESTINY, KAIRA...AND YOUR DESTINY BELONGS TO DARKNESS!

AAHRGH!
YOU B!#%H! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU CUT ME!
GIVE US BACK SORI, OR THE NEXT SWING OF MY BLADE WILL END YOUR MISERABLE EXISTENCE! THE SPREAD OF EVIL MUST STOP HERE AND NOW!
QUIETLY...UNASSUMINGLY... THE SINJA FOCUSES HIS MYSTICAL ENERGY.
THE POWER OF LIFE BESTOWED UPON HIM BY SEISHIN, GROWS WITHIN HIS BODY LIKE A RADIANT SUNRISE, SURROUNDING HIS BODY IN WARM LIGHT.
WHAT IS IT YOU'RE DOING, UNDEAD PAWN OF SEISHIN? YOUR PETTY POWERS CANNOT PROTECT THEM! I AM DARKNESS! I AM EVIL! YOU CANNOT DEFEAT ME!
WE SHALL SEE, EVIL ONE. WE SHALL SEE.


AS THE SINJA'S POWER INTENSIFIES, EVERY FIBER OF HIS BEING RADIATES WITH ENERGY...
UNTIL IT ENGULFS THE CREATURE IN WHITE LIGHT!
THE DEMON IS NO MATCH FOR THE FULL FURY OF SINJA'S POWER...
AND ITS HOLD ON SORI'S BODY IS FINALLY RELINQUISHED!
UUGH!

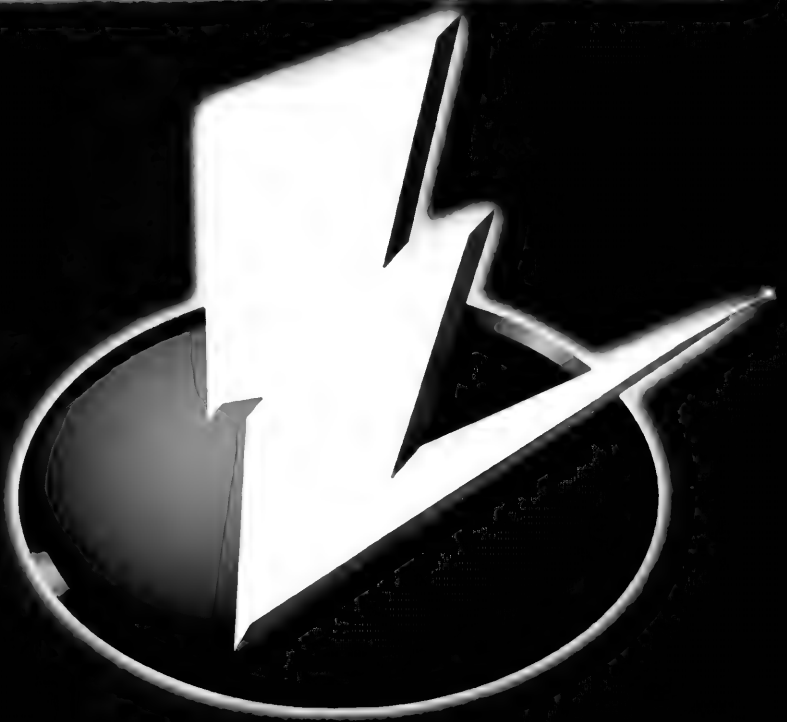
KAIRA, DO YOU THINK SHE'S ALL RIGHT?
REMAIN ON GUARD! IT COULD BE A TRICK!
OH, SORI, PLEASE LET IT BE YOU!
OOOh, MY HEAD. Where...WHERE AM I? MIYO, KAIRA, SAIPEI... IS THAT YOU?
YES, LITTLE SISTER, IT IS US! YOU'RE GOING TO BE OK. JUST REST.
HEY, WHERE'D THE SINJA GO?
GONE. JUST LIKE IN THE LEGEND.
HE'S THERE THE MOMENT YOU NEED HIM THE MOST, AND GONE ONCE HIS MISSION IS ACCOMPLISHED. NO DOUBT HE'S ON HIS WAY TO HELP OTHERS...JUST AS HE HELPED US.

SO, WHAT'S NEXT, KAIRA? DO WE GO AFTER ONNYO? TEACH HIM WHY HE SHOULDN'T HAVE MESSED WITH THE FOUR KUNOICHI?
HUNGRY FOR MORE BATTLE, SAIPEI? I ADMIRE YOUR SPIRIT, BUT I THINK WE'RE ALL IN NEED OF SOME REST.
OUR QUEST WAS TO DETERMINE THE FATE OF THE KOGA NINJA CLAN AND REUNITE WITH ANY SURVIVORS... WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT WE DID. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THE ONLY OTHER SURVIVOR WOULD ALSO BE A SINJA?
THEN LET'S GO HOME, KAIRA. I MISS FATHER, AND I KNOW IT WOULD PLEASE HIM TO SEE US!
AGREED! HOME IT IS, GIRLS! COME ON, LET'S PICK UP THE PACE!

THE END.

THE WORLD WIDE WEB JUST GOT STRUCK BY

LIGHTNING



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Lotsa' cool stuff happening this year with your favorite Lightning titles! Here's a preview of Lightning's **HOT PICKS** for '97:

Special Order These Books With Your Local Comics Store!

HELLINA

In her fourth year, Lightning's popular super-babe continues to deliver in 1997! In January, don't miss the spectacular 1997 *Hellina Pin-Up Special*! April brings *Hellina: The Evil Within* #1 and June kicks off with *Hellina: Devil inside* #1! Keep Your eye out for more Hellina titles!

Also, SKYBOLT TOYZ will release a posable, six inch HELLINA ACTION FIGURE in early spring!

Creator/owner Trent Kaniuga completes the Crainal Disorder mini-series with *CreeD: Crainal Disorder* #3 and then offers a spectacular surprise, grand-finale issue that will knock your socks off! Sorry to keep you guessing, but more details will be released later! Also, look for *CreeD: Collected*, Volume 1 in April collecting the first three issues of the first CreeD mini series!

The Four Kunoichi

Former Image artist, John Cleary continues to pack a hefty punch with his all female ninja super-team, The Four Kunoichi beginning bi-monthly in March!

Also, be on the look out for THE FOUR KUNOICHI ACTION FIGURES from SKYBOLT TOYZ due out late summer!

CATFIGHT

Don't miss the all new adventures of Catfight as she must learn to use her dream powers in reality! Also, this year marks the return of Lolli-Pop Man! New Catfight issues ship during the following months: March, July and November! Don't miss 'em!

BLOODFIRE

The death of the world's first H.I.V. positive superhero is an event that you won't want to miss. Death of Bloodfire #1 ships in June, 1997! To commemorate this event, this comic will be offered polybagged with a special surprise! Don't allow yourself to overlook this amazing issue!

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HELLINA

NAKED DESIRE

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Ripley Carver Paul Abrams

CREED

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TRENT KANIUGA

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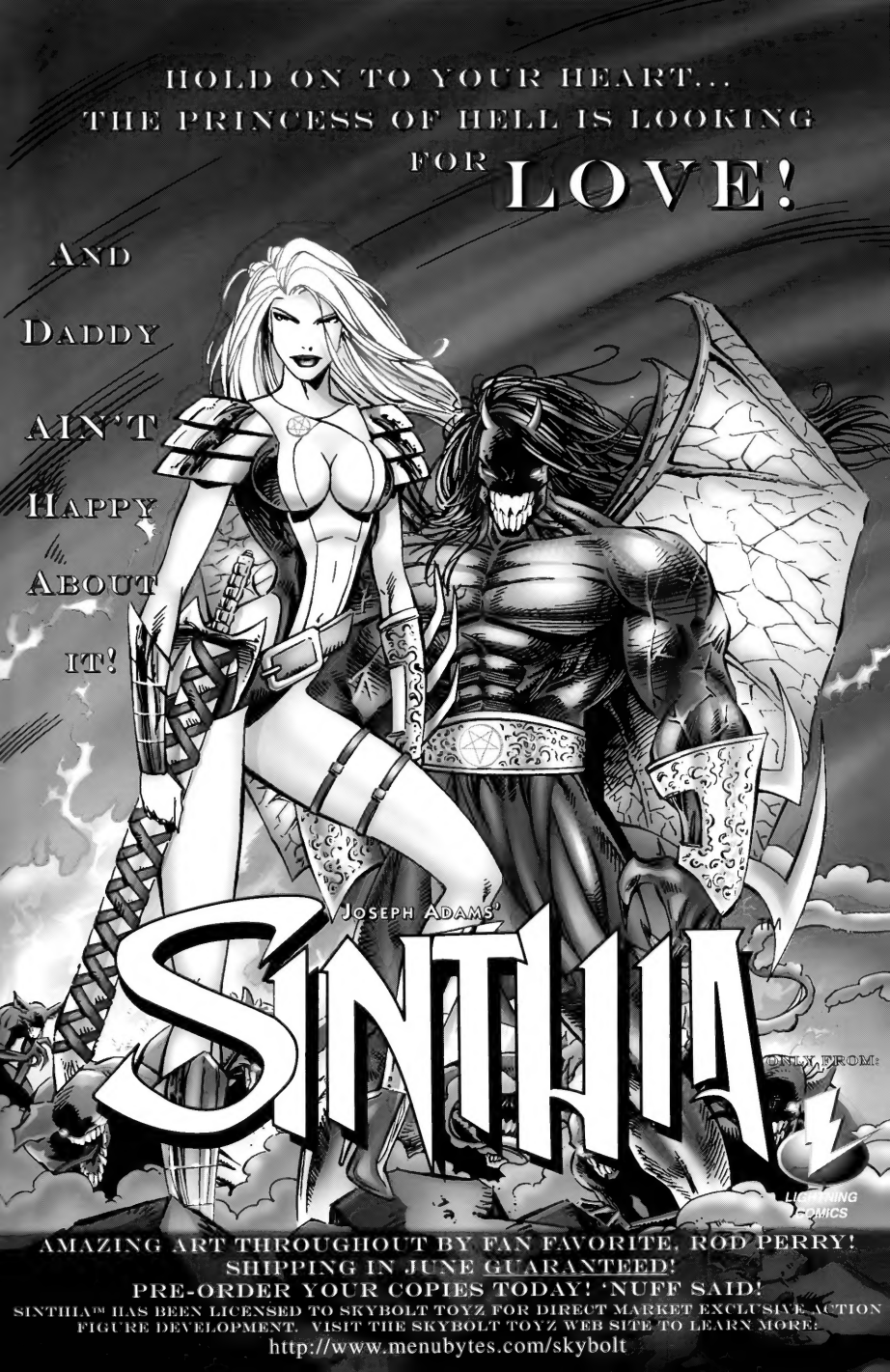
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